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Anna Basten

Clinton Frames her Campaign

Former Secretary of State Hilary Clinton announced she was running as a Democratic candidate for the upcoming 2016 presidential election on April 12, 2015. Clinton gave her announcement speech at the Franklin D. Roosevelt State Park in New York City. In her announcement speech, Clinton positions herself as the strongest candidate on the issue of creating an economy that works for every American by framing it as an unfair system that is in need of change. To gain support for the issue framing, Candidate Clinton constructs her character as a champion and a nurturing mother and incites the emotions of anger and hope.¹

In her announcement speech, Clinton sets the agenda on economic reform. Throughout her speech, Clinton makes it very clear that improving the economy is very important to her. She states, “I’m running to make our economy work for you and for every American” (Clinton). Clinton shows she create an economy that will treat every citizen fairly and allow for equal opportunity. As the speech continues, she addresses some specific policies. Clinton says, “I’ll propose to reward businesses who invest in long term value rather than the quick buck – because that leads to higher growth for the economy.” Clinton’s statement is proclaiming an explicit plan but the end goal is economic improvement; it is her main prerogative. Her announcement speech repeatedly sets an agenda of creating an economy that benefits all of America.

¹ This essay applies Medhurst’s (2005) conceptual overview of presidential campaign rhetoric – agenda-setting, framing, character construction, and emotional resonance.

During her speech, Clinton frames economic reform as an issue that has been approached unfairly in the past by Republicans. She claims that Republicans cater to a small portion of the population too often and this creates inequality between classes. Clinton states, “Republicans trip over themselves promising lower taxes for the wealthy and fewer rules for the biggest corporations without regard for how that will make income inequality even worse” (Clinton). In this claim, Clinton generalizes all Republicans. She does not call out a specific candidate or a past president but instead refers to all “Republicans,” which generalizes Republicans and their values. Clinton expresses that they clearly do care about the economic opportunities for the middle and lower class, which makes up the majority of the population but instead supplies benefits to the wealthiest few. She also stresses how significant this problem is with the phrase “even worse.” This calls the listener to believe that income inequality was already an issue, and instead of creating policies to improve this issue, others made it worse. Clinton states, “We were told that if we let those at the top pay lower taxes and bend the rules, their success would trickle down to everyone else” (Clinton). She goes on to say that this promise made by Republican was not kept. Success at the top did not trickle down to those on the bottom. The language used in this quote portrays the Republicans as deceitful. Not only did they create an unfair system that supplied more benefits to the small percentage of people in the upper class, but they also justified this action by building hope for those who did not directly receive success.

Clinton strengthens this frame by stressing the value of unity and by claiming that “we” can solve the economic problem. She states that “we can build an economy where hard work is rewarded.” The word “we” is referring to all Americans. This is

emphasizing the problematic approach Republicans choose to take when reforming the economy. According to Clinton, they help a very small percentage of people who are the wealthiest in the entire nation, while she includes everyone. She frames her ideals as the best suited for the greatest portion of the American population.

Clinton constructs her character as a champion throughout her speech in order to strengthen the argument that she is the best candidate on the issue of creating an equal opportunity economy. She said, “I want to be... your champion. If you’ll give me the chance, I’ll wage and win Four Fights for you. The first is to make the economy work for everyday Americans, not just those at the top” (Clinton). This statement leads the listeners to believe that Clinton is not only willing to advocate for a working economy but that she will win in her efforts to do so. She will not stop until a just economy is created in America. This statement also presents economic reform as Clinton’s top priority. Of the four battles she is claiming to win for the American people, making the economy work for everyday Americans comes first.

Clinton also takes on the person of a mother. She claims that, “like any family, our American family is strongest when we cherish what we have in common, and fight back against those who would drive us apart” (Clinton). Every family has a head.

Throughout her entire speech, Clinton has stressed the fact that she is a leader so creating this family analogy leads the listener to believe that Clinton is or has the potential to be the mother of our American family. She also connects this character to her original framing of her agenda. It can be perceived that Clinton is inferring that American citizens must fight back against republicans who wish to drive the American “family” apart by creating a larger separation between economic classes. A mother is nurturing and looks

out for the best interest of her children. As mentioned earlier, Clinton promises “to make our economy work for you and for every American” (Clinton). Not only is Clinton expressing her interest for everyone but she also uses the word “you” to make the listener feel particularly important, in the same way a nurturing mother feels it necessary to make her child feel special.

Throughout her announcement speech, Clinton calls her audience to feel anger and hope. She elicits anger by comparing how the economy has affected the top few in the upper class, and the majority of people. She states, “You see corporations making record profits, with CEOs making record pay, but your paychecks have barely budged” (Clinton). Clinton uses the word “your” to grab the attention of every listener. She wants every individual who is not associated with the upper class to know that they have personally been cheated by the government. Clinton continues to state examples that showcase the remarkable divided between economic classes. She says, “While many of you are working multiple jobs to make ends meet, you see the top 25 hedge fund managers making more than all of America’s kindergarten teachers combined” (Clinton). Clinton uses this example to further exaggerate her point. It is often assumed throughout the United States that children are a top priority. To say that the total of all the individuals responsible for molding the minds of America’s children are not receiving the same amount as 25 hedge fund managers is to strike a strong sense of anger. Clinton is trying to create a deep sense of anger in her listeners. She wants them to know that it is not just them who have been treated unfairly but also the majority of the population, including their own children, and all children.

Toward the end of her speech, after she allows the feeling of anger to resonate within each of her listeners, Clinton begins to build hope. She states “We can build an economy where hard work is rewarded. We can strengthen our families. We can defend our country and increase our opportunities all over the world. And we can renew the promise of our democracy” (Clinton). Clinton tells these people that all their problems can and will be solved. This statement calls for the listener to feel hopeful and at ease. It also calls them to feel a sense of responsibility. Clinton does not simply telling them that she can make these changes but instead that “we” must make these changes. This phrase implies that one must vote for her to maintain this hope and experience fair economic progress throughout the nation.

Using the emotions anger and hope, and constructing herself as a nurturing mother and a champion for all, Clinton frames the issue of equal economic opportunity as a problem that has been neglected by Republicans in order to portray herself as strongest candidate on the issue of economic reform. Clinton repeatedly concluded that all her economic policies would be created fairly for every American and create equal opportunity for the majority of the population. Of course, Clinton is not the first candidate to make these promises. In fact most Democratic candidates do. But it is not every 4 years that a Democratic candidate is found in office. How is it that a candidate who appeals to the masses does not always win? Do people vote in their best interest? What other factors influence an informed citizen’s voting decision?

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